

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in the Bridges Room, Civic Centre, Gateshead on **Friday 17 June 2011 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor O Temple (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Durham County Council

Councillors A Bainbridge, J Hunter, O Johnson and J Wilson

Gateshead Council:

Councillors M Ord, P Ronan, D Davidson and M Wallace

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Durham County Council

Councillors J Docherty, M Hodgson and J Nicholson

Gateshead Council

Councillors K Dodds, M Gannon and J Hamilton

1 Membership of the Joint Committee

Members were advised that following the Annual Meetings of Durham County Council and Gateshead Council membership of the Joint Committee had remained unchanged.

Resolved: That the membership of the Joint Committee be noted.

2 Appointment of Chair for the Ensuing year

Nominations were requested for the position of Chair of the Joint Committee.

Councillor Ronan moved and Councillor Davidson seconded that Councillor Temple be re-elected as Chair for the forthcoming year.

Resolved: That Councillor Temple be elected as Chair of the Joint Committee.

3 Appointment of Vice-Chair for the Ensuing year

Nominations were requested for the position of Vice-Chair of the Joint Committee.

Councillor Ronan moved and Councillor Davidson seconded that Councillor Dodds be appointed as Vice-Chair for the forthcoming year.

Resolved: That Councillor Dodds be elected as Vice-Chair of the Joint Committee.

4 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 April 2011

The minutes of the meeting held 21 April 2011 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6 Report of the Superintendent & Registrar

The Superintendent and Registrar presented his report which provided the Joint Committee with a quarterly update relating to performance and other operational matters (for copy see file of minutes).

Performance Update

Copies of the schedule of cremations had been circulated and Members were advised that there had been a slight increase on the comparable period last year.

Operational Matters

Recycling of Orthopaedic Implants and Non-Ferrous Metals:

The Joint Committee had previously agreed to participate in a scheme for the recycling of orthopaedic implants and non-ferrous metal to provide a convenient way to recycle these metals and reduce the carbon footprint of the Crematorium. Members were advised that the recycling containers would be delivered during the company's next collection in the North East which would be in July.

Grounds Maintenance:

The grass cutting season was well underway and the Superintendent and Registrar was pleased to report the continuing positive comments from visitors in relation to grounds maintenance.

Potential for a Memorial Garden:

Members were reminded that the Joint Committee had previously agreed the development of a business case for the creation of a Memorial Garden. In the intervening period initial plans had been drawn up and options would be presented to the next meeting of the Joint Committee for consideration.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance for the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That progress in relation to the recycling of orthopaedic implants and non-ferrous metals be noted.

- (iii) That the continual improvements in relation to grounds maintenance be noted.
- (iv) That the progress made in relation to the Memorial Garden be noted.

7 Forward Plan 2011/12

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support, Neighbourhood Services, presented the report which set out proposals for a suggested forward plan of meetings (for copy see file of minutes). A proposed schedule of meetings showing the reports which would be presented had been circulated.

Members commented that in the past the Joint Committee had occasionally met at the Crematorium and felt that it would be useful to continue to do so, perhaps once per year. A suggestion was made that as proposals for the Memorial Garden were to be considered at the July meeting that would be an ideal opportunity to meet at the Crematorium.

Resolved:

- (i) That the schedule of meetings as circulated be approved.
- (ii) That the July meeting of the Joint Committee be held at Mountsett Crematorium.
- (iii) That in future years, at least one meeting per year be held at the Crematorium.

8 Annual Internal Audit Report 2010/2011

The Audit Manager, Resources, presented this report which requested Members to consider the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee Annual Internal Audit Report for 2010/2011, copies of which had been circulated (for copy see file of minutes).

The Joint Committee was advised that the Assurance level for the review had been classed as Substantial which meant that the internal control systems in place were working effectively however some low risk, minor weaknesses had been identified which, if addressed, would further assist the Joint Committee's system objectives.

The Audit Manager also advised Members that the audit process was changing and in future years would be more risk based and that revisions had been made to the Internal Audit Charter, programme of works and level of fees, details of which had been circulated.

The Chair noted that the achievement of a Substantial rating was very pleasing and asked that the Joint Committee's congratulation be passed to the staff responsible.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Annual Internal Audit Report and the overall opinion provided on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Joint Committee's control environment for the year 2010/2011 be noted.

- (ii) That the revised Internal Audit Charter, programme of work and level of fees for the year 2011/2012 be approved.

9 Response to the 2010/2011 Internal Audit Report

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support, Neighbourhood Services, presented this report which set out the response to the Internal Audit Report for Members' consideration (for copy see file of minutes).

The Internal Audit Report had provided Substantial Assurance on the Joint Committee's systems of internal control highlighting only very minor governance and internal control issues which had been classified as low risk. It was considered desirable however to address these minor weaknesses to strengthen the system of internal control and an action plan had therefore been produced addressing the following:-

- Adjustments should be made to ensure all Book of Remembrance income correctly accounted for VAT.
- Application forms should be signed by the Funeral Director.
- Dates of when ashes were collected must be recorded on the collecting form together with the signature of the person collecting the ashes.
- Consideration should be given to the development of a Service Asset Plan.

A number of these actions had already been implemented and the action plan further indicated the Joint Committee's level of commitment in ensuring all systems of internal control were as robust as possible.

Resolved: That the Internal Control requirements and the action plan contents, both implemented and required with regards to addressing the Internal Audit recommendation be noted.

10 Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Audit for 2010/11

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support, Neighbourhood Services, presented this report which updated the Joint Committee on revisions to the review of the effectiveness of the system of internal audit which had been considered in February 2011, a number of areas having improved, mainly as a result of the approval of the Service Level Agreement and Internal Audit Charter (for copy see file of minutes).

Members were advised that a review of Durham County Council's system had been undertaken and reported to the Council's Audit Committee. A copy of the review had been made available to the External Auditor however the External Auditor had made recommendations that about the need for the Joint Committee to review its own terms to ensure that they included the expected role and responsibilities of an audit committee. Members were therefore asked to consider whether they were satisfied with the effectiveness of the system of Internal Audit and to consider whether it was felt necessary to establish an audit committee to undertake further assurance work. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support explained to the Joint Committee that there was no statutory requirement to have an audit

committee, however if Members were minded to establish one, it would be good practise to appoint an independent co-opted member or members.

The Chair enquired whether Members felt that it was necessary to establish an audit committee. During discussion, Members commented that they were satisfied with the effectiveness of the current systems and did not feel it necessary to establish such a committee.

Resolved: That the Joint Committee is satisfied with the effectiveness of the current system of Internal Audit and does not consider it necessary to establish a separate audit committee.

11 2010/11 Annual Governance Statement

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support, Neighbourhood Services presented this report which provided details of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the year 2010/2011 (for copy see file of minutes). The AGS needed to be formally approved by Members as part of the consideration of the Statement of Accounts and Small Bodies in England Annual Return 2010/2011. Copies of the AGS had been previously circulated. This drew on evidence from the Internal Audit report, external assessments etc; plus the reports and business of the Joint Committee during the year.

The Crematorium Joint Committee had adopted and operated under a code of corporate governance which was consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' and the AGS explained how the Joint Committee complied with the code and met the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Amendments)(England) Regulations 2006 in relation to the publication of a statement on internal control. The Annual Governance Statement included a review of the governance arrangements in place and identified that there were no significant governance issues/weaknesses to correct.

Resolved: That the Annual Governance Statement be approved and signed by the Chair.

12 Revenue Outturn & Statement of Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2011

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support, Neighbourhood Services, presented this report which sought approval of the Small Bodies in England Annual Return and supporting Statement of Accounts, copies of which had been circulated (for copy see file of minutes).

The Annual Return would be subject to external audit by the Joint Committee's appointed external auditors, with the audit due to commence on 8 July 2011.

The Annual Return and Statement of Accounts had been prepared considering the requirements of the 2010/2011 'Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in Great Britain' as updated and published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

Members were reminded that quarterly budgetary control reports had been considered throughout the year and a provisional outturn report had been presented to Members in April 2011. Details of the final outturn position as incorporated into the Statement of Accounts had been circulated with the papers.

Resolved: That the outturn position as set out in the report be noted.

13 2010/11 Small Bodies Return

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support, Neighbourhood Services, explained to Members that the Small Bodies in England Annual Return required signing by the Chair following approval by the Joint Committee.

Resolved: That the Small Bodies in England Annual Return for 2010/2011 be approved and signed by the Chair.